

Loudoun Strategic Watershed Plan Solutions

Summary of Strategic Planning Interviews

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During January and February, 2006, the Institute for Environmental Negotiation conducted 17 interviews with stakeholders representing different perspectives and interests about the development of a strategy for watershed planning in Loudoun County. These interviews were conducted in preparation for the first meeting of the Loudoun Strategic Watershed Plan Solutions (SWMS) team on February 22-23, 2006. There was considerable variation in stakeholder responses to the questions (which are listed at the end of this summary). A summary of the widely-shared responses is provided below.

Key Issues And Concerns For The Development Of A Strategy For Watershed Planning In Loudoun County

Growth and development concerns - Many interviewees highlighted how growth and land use impact watersheds. Concerns were expressed about the dramatic rate of growth, and whether infrastructure and water supply were going to keep pace with the demands of growth. Others expressed the need for a balanced and realistic view of growth and natural resource management issues, and that extreme positions of no-growth, or all-growth are neither realistic nor healthy. 'Smart growth' principles were suggested by several interviewees as a potential guiding principle for watershed management. There was also a call to quantify or further understand the impacts of growth and development so informed choices for the future could be made.

Implementation – Several interviewees expressed interest in finding out who would be responsible for the oversight and implementation of the watershed plan at both the County and citizen level. Many people wanted to know who would carry out the strategies and actions identified through the planning process, and who has authority for decision-making and implementation. The plan should be a living, long-term document with clear criteria, priorities and resource allocations. The issue of on-going stakeholder involvement in implementation was a concern as well.

Participation and process - A number of interviewees stated that a balanced, diversified group of stakeholders needs to be involved in the watershed planning process, and that the process should not just be informative in nature, but designed to truly engage participants in meaningful plan design. On-going face-to-face interactions are important. A need was expressed for an ongoing role for a steering committee or task force to be involved throughout the entire watershed planning process.

Clarity and shared understanding - A number of people expressed the need for the process to have clear understanding of definitions, expectations, objectives and goals and to commit to on-going and open communication.

Specific watershed issues or problems of concern - Interviewees identified a few miscellaneous watershed concerns or problems, such as the permitting and ongoing maintenance issue of alternative septic systems, unknown impacts of biosolids applications, compliance with increasingly strict state and federal regulations, inadequate monitoring or knowledge of impaired, Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) streams, and increasing stream degradation. Increased nutrient loading and non-point source pollution from agricultural

uses were a common concern. The lack of clear knowledge about the relationship between stormwater runoff and TMDLs was also identified as a concern.

Political leadership and support – A number of interviewees expressed the importance of garnering the support of elected officials for the development of the Loudoun Strategic Watershed Plan Solutions effort. A few interviewees felt that more needs to be done by elected officials in Loudoun County to protect water quality and establish minimum requirements or laws regarding water quality.

Policies, regulations, services - A variety of concerns were raised about the County's current lack of policies, codes or planning for such things as Low Impact Development (LID), zoning and stormwater management, stormwater and TMDL concerns, and adequate public services and infrastructure concerns. Interviewees expressed support to put the stream protection overlay ordinance back in force. Finite water supply capacities were a concern, including the increasing number of dry wells and lowered stream flows. There was concern over compliance with the Chesapeake Bay Preservation Agreement (CBPA) requirements. There was also concern expressed about municipal separate storm sewer system (MS4) permitting.

Education and outreach – Several interviewees expressed strong support for citizen watershed education and outreach within Loudoun County. Education ideas included education on Best Management Practices (BMPs) guidelines for individual homeowners to help reduce stormwater runoff. Furthermore, interviewees expressed that the County could serve a unique role as a leader in educational efforts and provider of education and outreach activities within the County.

Knowledge management – Several interviewees expressed a need to fully locate, compile and assess existing data and studies. Many expressed that it is important to obtain a baseline of data. Participants expressed a need for open access to information, existing studies, and to clearly define and delineate watersheds. A further need was expressed to understand the conditions of the streams so that the streams in healthy condition can be protected and those that are impaired can be improved. There is a need for greater coordination and data sharing between county departments.

Watershed goals - Some interviewees suggested goals for the watersheds including preserving healthy streams and clean drinking water, protection of water quality and quantity, and surface and ground water resource protection.

Opportunities In The Development Of A Watershed Plan

Increased awareness, education, and commitment - A number of interviewees suggested that a watershed planning process would provide an opportunity to increase citizen awareness of watershed issues through increased educational outreach efforts. Many interviewees commented that this is an opportunity for the County to increase its role and involvement in education and outreach.

Resource mobilization and organization - The watershed planning process offers an opportunity to mobilize more resources, monetary and in-kind, and possibly greater private sector contributions in terms of mitigation, program support, proffered improvements or Low Impact Development (LID) practices. There are excellent resources available to draw upon (i.e., Loudoun County Sanitation Authority (LCSA) engineers) as well as an opportunity to pull together and analyze substantial baseline data (i.e., monitoring, studies).

Building broad-based support – A watershed planning process offers opportunities to build broad-based support and synergy among the stakeholders, to build on efforts such as

the LCSA Water Forum, clarify everyone's roles and responsibilities, and to ultimately to deliver an implemented plan. Successful results in this effort can bring forth successes elsewhere, not necessarily just in watershed planning.

Harnessing the potential of Loudoun's Citizens - Many interviewees suggested that beyond raising awareness, there is a great opportunity to harness the potential of active citizenry. Many Loudoun citizens are well educated and affluent and are willing to be personally engaged in some aspect of watershed protection. There is an opportunity for overall greater communication and coordination between different citizen groups, and different County agencies.

Developing long-term Loudoun County staffing capacity and commitment - Many interviewees noted opportunities for the County to hire dedicated staff, with a diversity of skills, to provide implementation leadership and coordinate volunteer and citizen involvement and activities. There is an opportunity for Loudoun County to come into greater compliance with the principles of its General Plan. It was also noted by a few that there is an opportunity for greater compliance with the Chesapeake Bay Preservation Act.

Learning and implementing new ideas and technologies - A number of interviewees opportunities to learn from other watershed planning models, such as Fairfax or Fauquier Counties, and to embrace and implement new ideas or concepts such as water banking or LID. Some interviewees reflected that there are opportunities for Loudoun to increase and implement LID practices, and to increase the storm water management infrastructure in general. Schools in particular were identified as potential leaders and models for LID.

Protecting the many good existing qualities of Loudoun's watershed - Interviewees expressed that watershed planning is an opportunity to protect Loudoun's existing strong rural and environmental character, its many streams in healthy condition, its existing forests and riparian buffers, its natural topography, and to sustain clean drinking water. Furthermore, interviewees stated that Loudoun is currently in a prime position to develop a watershed plan: LID requirements can be put in place for new development; much of the County is still rural in nature and not built-out as are some neighboring counties; and the planning process can build upon the synergy of other existing watershed efforts within the County. Interviewees expressed strong support for the County to be proactive rather than reactive in its watershed planning effort.

The SWMS interview questions included:

1. How are you involved with watersheds in Loudoun County?
2. What are the key issues and concerns that you feel are critical in the development of a strategy for watershed planning in Loudoun County?
3. What are the greatest opportunities that you see in the development in a watershed plan?
4. The hope of Loudoun County is that at the end of this process we will have a Declaration of Cooperation, agreement, or Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), that describes the framework for creating and implementing the watershed plan. What are your initial thoughts about what key components of the MOU would be important to you? Is there anything more specific that you would need to be in a MOU for this partnership?
5. We are conducting an inventory of ongoing watershed activities and existing resources in Loudoun County. Do you have any specific ideas or suggestions of activities or resources we should be aware of? Can you send us specific information on those activities?
6. What resources do you have available that you could bring to this watershed strategy planning process? i.e. studies, graphics, mapping, etc.
7. What information do you need to be able to participate effectively?
8. Who else should be participating? What are the other groups that should be participating?